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VOICE OF AMERICA

Office of Programs

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PASHTO SERVICE

PROGRAM REVIEW NOTES

Program Review - May 12

Follow-up - June 16

SUMMARY

The Pashto Service strives to be the best single source of information about Afghanistan and Afghanistan-related issues. A highly-dedicated staff and an award-winning music program are among assets of the Service. In the coming months, VOA Pashto will prepare contingency plans for the possible cessation of jamming and possibilities for on-scene coverage of Afghanistan once again for the first time since 1980. The Service also will name a senior producer and concentrate efforts on brightening overall presentation and sound for the post-jamming era.

OVERVIEW

VOA Pashto broadcasts three times daily for a total of two hours. A half-hour early-morning Breakfast Show airs on medium wave at 0000 GMT (4:30 A.M. in Kabul, 8 P.M. EDT), and a 45-minute morning transmission follows at 0130 GMT (6 A.M. in Kabul, 9:30 P.M. EDT). In the evening, the Service broadcasts a 45-minute airshow at 1430 GMT (7 P.M. in Kabul, 10:30 A.M. EDT). According to the March 1988 staffing pattern, the Service has 16 staff positions with no vacancies. Stringers in Peshawar and Quetta, close to the target area, are extensively used.

The Service directs its broadcasts to an estimated 16,000,000 to 18,000,000 Pushtuns, most of whom live in war-ravaged Afghanistan. Several million tribesmen currently reside in refugee camps in neighboring Pakistan. The Pashto Service was established on July 4, 1982, in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan 2½ years earlier. A sister service, Dari, has been on the air since 1980. Soviet jamming of both services persists.

The recent signing of the Geneva agreement by the USSR pledges a withdrawal of the more than 100,000 Soviet troops from Afghanistan in the coming months. As the occupation ends, VOA Pashto and VOA Dari will be working together to explore a possible rescheduling of programming, to vary the programming mix, and to meet the challenges of relative normalization in Afghanistan.

Research. Pushtuns represent about 60% of Afghanistan's population. There has been no recent USIA or VOA research. A study was conducted by the BBC and Deutsche Welle in 1984. This sample was taken from the camp population in the Peshawar area. The sample was predominantly Pashto, and indicated that VOA ranked fourth among international broadcasters with 23.5% of projected adult listeners. The 1984 survey indicated that BBC was first among international broadcasters, followed by Radios Tehran and Kabul. VOA Research Director Kim Elliott hopes to be able to obtain fresh data from a survey to be conducted this summer by the BBC and Radio Liberty.

Competition. VOA Pashto competes with eight other international broadcasters. All seek to attract an audience which has a literacy rate of less than one-third, which is largely rural, and which has little cultural contact with Western societies. Because of the relative proximity of their transmission facilities, all of VOA's primary competitors (BBC, Radio Moscow, Radio Kabul, and Radio Pakistan) have better signals in the target area. Except for the latter two, which are local area stations, the international competition broadcasts mainly news and news-related features. The BBC will soon add 30 minutes to its programming, bringing its daily total to 1½ hours.

Signal delivery. VOA Pashto appears to reach the largest number of listeners in the early morning hours, when unjammed medium wave signals from Rhodes get through. The early morning broadcast consists of the most important news and news-related material from the preceding day. Monitoring reports prepared for the review indicated that a few shortwave frequencies used for the late morning and early evening broadcasts are clear. Most of these frequencies, however, are jammed most of the time. None of the other international broadcasters are jammed.

PROGRAMMING IMPACT

VOA Pashto Service Chief Richard Scott identifies the BBC as VOA's principal competitor, because of the commitment of both stations to accuracy in reporting. The political situation in Afghanistan and among Pashto-speakers in Pakistan has changed significantly because of the recent announcement of an imminent withdrawal of Soviet troops. During the April 19-26 review period, the backhalves of VOA Pashto airshows dealt primarily with the fighting in Afghanistan, and the Geneva accords. The Service has turned increasingly to direct contact with political figures in the Afghan community and in Pakistan, to obtain recorded assessments of the situation. Sources have included mujaheddin leaders, field commanders, Pakistani government officials and opposition figures, scholars, and refugees. VOA is quoted frequently as a source in the Pakistani press. Interviews with prominent specialists on Afghanistan have become easy to arrange because contacts value an appearance on the Voice.

As it devises a strategy for broadcasting during the recovery and reconstruction of Afghanistan, the Pashto Service hopes to take advantage, in the near future, of on-the-scene reportage from Kabul by VOA Islamabad bureau chief John Schulz. Some repeat programming would be eliminated, in the event the USSR stops jamming of VOA broadcasts.

The Pashto Service also will refine its production, explore ways of increasing cooperation and coordination with the Dari Service, and sustain its commendable effort to increase Americana programming (in a context understandable to Pushtuns) and backgrounding of the U.S. election campaign.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The review panel made the following recommendations. Action on these recommendations will be discussed at the Pashto Service follow-up session, Thursday, June 16, at 2:15 P.M., in the Pashto Service offices (1470).

The Pashto Service will:

1. Sustain day-to-day coordination with VOA Dari and other Division services. This coordination will include:
 - Sharing of information from an expected 1988 BBC-Radio Liberty survey in the Peshawar camps;
 - Consulting with BRN services about a schedule realignment which might permit Pashto and Dari to mount two hour-long broadcasts daily; one in the morning and one in the evening;
 - Agreement by the Pashto and Dari service chiefs to attend each other's program reviews and follow-ups in the future.
2. Attempt to make full use of anticipated on-scene coverage by correspondent John Schulz in Afghanistan, and eventually develop stringer or staff coverage of its own.
3. Continue to check out stringer and central news wire information with the South Asia regional desk in the Newsroom to ensure accuracy and solid sourcing.
4. As conditions permit, expand coverage of world news and use of international events in both newscasts and news-related programming.
5. Seek opportunities to increase the use of scripts backgrounding the American electoral process.
6. Share Service-originated VITA materials on rural development issues with the Urdu and Africa Division services.
7. Designate a senior producer to work closely with Division Executive Producer Nancy Bouse on an extensive production upgrading and training program.
8. In production enhancement, priorities will be:
 - Brighten presentation;
 - Schedule pre-broadcast rehearsals on a regular basis;
 - Screen field reports and interviews for technical quality;
 - Work on developing MC skills;
 - Continue development of indigenous and Western music bridges;
 - Coordinate more closely with technicians when production help is lacking;
 - Sustain the commendable use of English Programs voice coach Frank Oliver to give talent more confidence and enliven delivery --- especially in morning broadcasts.

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9. Regularly monitor BBC Pashto tapes to stimulate discussion about regional coverage and other approaches.

The News Division will:

10. At the earliest opportunity, seek a visa for Islamabad correspondent John Schulz to report from Afghanistan.
11. Pursue the idea of expediting the flow of regional news items by moving these on the wire separately, rather than in batches.

The Current Affairs Division will:

12. Alert services to the forthcoming release of a three-part *Focus* series on Afghanistan by stringer Richard Evans on scene in South Asia.
13. Promote widely a forthcoming series on Development of the American Economy.
14. Continue to use Pashto Service senior editor Ali Ahmad Jalali on *Press Conference USA* panels related to Afghanistan.

External Affairs will:

15. Consult with the BBC and Radio Liberty about the possibility of obtaining results of the 1988 survey of Afghan listeners planned for Pakistan later this year.

The Frequency Division will:

16. Inform the Office of Programs immediately if there is a change in the pattern or frequency of Soviet jamming of VOA Pashto or Dari.
17. Work with the Office of Programs, the North Africa/Near East/South Asia Division, and the Afghan services to formulate a new broadcast schedule for south and central Asian languages.

CONTENT

News and news-related material. News Division editor Rachel Bail praised the good cooperation between the Pashto Service and the South Asia regional desk. She noted that updating of news items was usually on the mark. Ms. Bail expressed hope that the Service would expand its use of world and U.S. items. The Service explained that it is sometimes difficult to put news items such as those wrapping up New York primary returns into a context Pashto audiences can easily understand.

Features. Current Affairs Division Chief Ed Warner commended senior editor Jalali for his contributions to *Press Conference USA* as a specialist on Afghan affairs. Mr. Warner recommended a series of *Closeup* scripts on the U.S. electoral process as a way of providing dimension and context for Afghan listeners. Mr. Scott noted that agriculture development topics are of interest to the audience. He suggested sharing reports on Volunteers In Technical Assistance (VITA) with Current Affairs and other broadcast services. The Service receives these reports from contacts in Peshawar.

Editorials and opinion packages. Mr. Scott said the Office of Policy has been very responsive to suggestions concerning editorials, and that the Pashto Service appreciates that a number of editorials lately have treated Afghanistan or related subjects. Policy Office representative Bill Whitson said there is close daily consultation with both Afghan services.

PRESENTATION AND SOUND

Production. Ed Gursky of the Programs Office urged the Pashto Service to enliven the presentation of air shows, especially the early morning shortwave broadcast. The panel agreed that daily pre-broadcast rehearsals and *post mortems* should help improve overall sound. (See Recommendation 8.) The panel also recognized that when VOA Pashto was inaugurated six years ago, few of the broadcasters had any previous on-air experience. It was noted that the Service has been innovative in seeking specially-designed training by English Programs to develop broadcast skills. Division Executive Producer Nancy Bouse said that a Service senior producer soon would be designated to direct overall production enhancement. The panel commended this initiative.

Music. Music Director Judith Massa congratulated the Service on winning the VOA annual music programming award. She lauded the originality of the music program, *Wildflowers*, in which American and Pushtun country music are compared thematically. Lyrics of the American music are adapted and explained. Ms. Massa will provide assistance by interviewing some American country musicians especially for the Pashto series.

RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

VOA Pashto has a staff of 16 with no vacancies. Virginia Garner of the Office of Personnel reported that three broadcasters are in the "pipeline," one of whom is cleared. Mr. Scott observed that the Pashto Service has 16 authorized positions, while the Dari Service has 18 slots with the same amount of broadcast time. Division Chief Sam Hilmy said this disparity would be reviewed, as vacancies occur in the Dari Service.

NEW PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The North Africa, Near East, and South Asia Division has proposed the use of Voyager on the Mall for the July Fourth celebration. This would be the second consecutive year for such a VOA/BRN initiative. Broadcast Operations already is ordering circuits for the remote. There also is a chance that Voyager may be deployed to cover Independence Day in a small nearby community with a multilingual team.

WORTHY OF SHARING

- The Pashto, Dari and Urdu Services hold a weekly conference call with Islamabad correspondent John Schulz shortly after an Embassy briefing on the military and political situation in Afghanistan. This conference call enables VOA to sort out conflicting news agency reports and get the straight story on the air much more rapidly than was possible a few months ago.
- The Pashto Service, working with External Affairs, has published 5,000 copies of a one-page program schedule brochure which is now being circulated in the Pakistan refugee camps and in Afghan communities around the world.
- The Service also is continuing the cassette distribution program to these communities. The tapes contain the latest news and information about Afghanistan which is eagerly sought by Afghans living in South Asia, the Arabian peninsula, Canada, and elsewhere.

cc: VOA - Mr. Carlson VOA - Amb. Barry VOA - Mr. Smith
VOA - Mr. Henry VOA - Ms. Morris VOA - Ms. Binda
VOA/B - Mr. Davis VOA/E - Dr. Frese VOA/G - Mr. Munson
VOA/P - Ms. Brambilla VOA/P - Ms. Fox VOA/X - Mr. Coonrod
VOA/X - Dr. Elliott VOA/BB - Mr. Ireland VOA/BB - Mr. Mirza
VOA/EOF - Mr. Goodwin P/R - Mr. Demitz

Clearances:

VOA/B - Mr. Heil all
VOA/BB - Mr. DeFontaine all